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REPORT ON
PROPOSED SIGN REGULATIONS
FOR MARKET STREET

San Francisco, Department of City Planning

January 1970 //

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REPORT ON
PROPOSED SIGN REGULATIONS
FOR MARKET STREET

The Need and the Opportunity

For much of San Francisco's history, Market Street has been a center of commercial activity in the city and a focus for life in the Bay region. Market merges two separate street patterns, forms a transit spine for downtown, attracts more pedestrians than any other street, and hosts public ceremonies. This prominence has created an interest in the appearance and vitality of Market Street unparalleled anywhere else in the region.

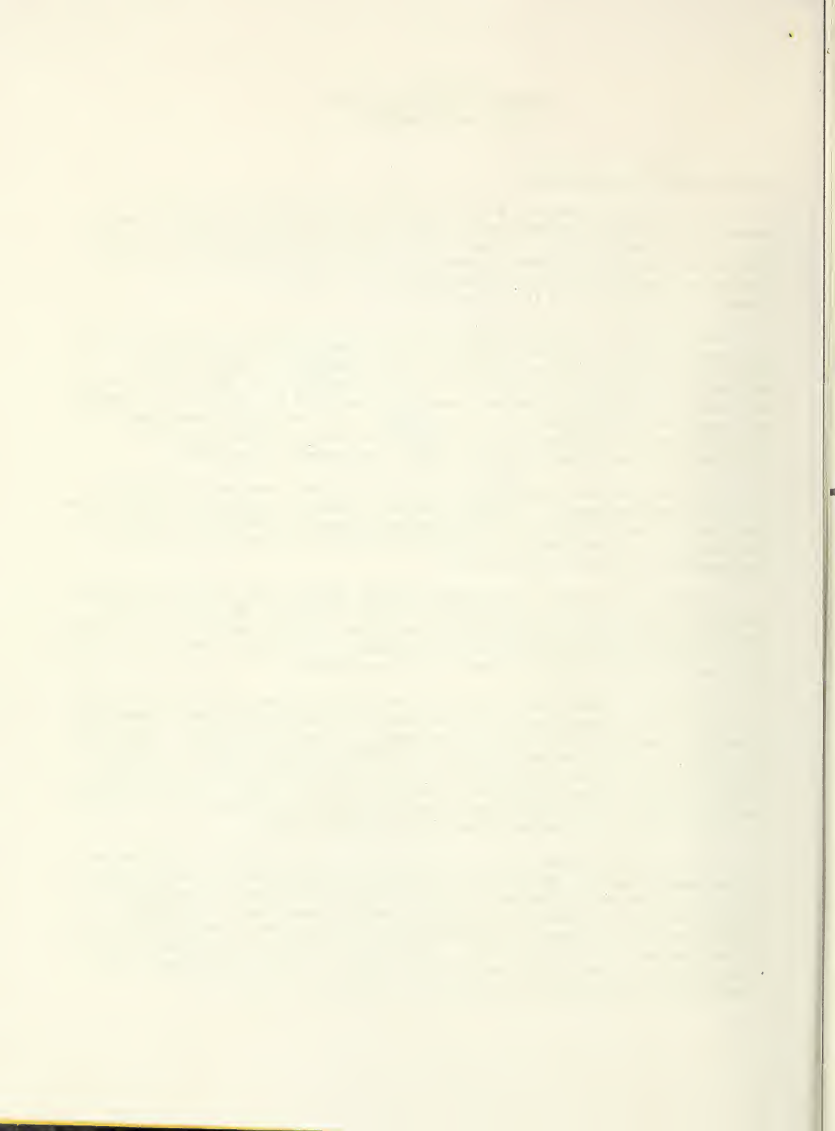
Construction of a subway beneath the street has brought outstanding development opportunities. This was recognized by the people of the city when, in June 1968, they approved a \$24.5 million bond issue pledging city-wide financial support for rebuilding of Market Street with the completion of BART. These efforts will make of the street an entirely new environment for the people of the region and a new face for visitors to the city. There will be specially-designed brick sidewalks, street furnishings (including bus shelters, benches, directional signs and newspaper stands), several plazas, and abundant landscaping.

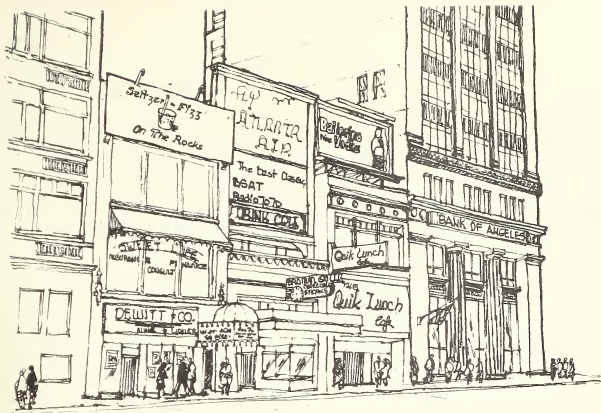
There are increasing indications that work in the street area will help stimulate a breakthrough in private investment. Several major new buildings have been put up or are under way. Owners and businessmen all along the street are considering extensive remodeling. Nevertheless, many regard 1970 as a time of environmental crisis on Market Street.

On much of the street, the greatest visual impact (apart from the temporary disruption by work on BART) is from the clutter of signs. The signs dominate, clash, block one another, detract from underlying building design, and set a tone that detracts from efforts to bring new dignity to the street. The contrast with the fine commercial streets of the world is tremendous.

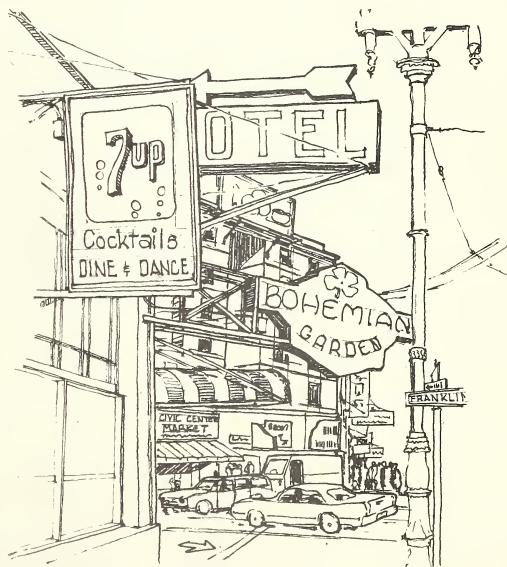
But present opportunities make possible a rapid change. Reconstruction of the street will create a unifying scale and put a new emphasis upon viewing of signs by pedestrians rather than by motorists and streetcar riders. There will be broader sidewalks and more people. New forms of advertising will appear in the transit system and on structures in the sidewalk areas. Some of the old signs and marquees have already been removed for work on BART. As new buildings and remodelings occur other signs can be improved -- especially if all owners and businessmen are given the reassurance of uniform rules.

It is imperative that action be taken now on sign controls. Business on Market Street has been depressed by the subway construction. As the stations are covered over and the street rebuilt, business will have its best chance of surging forward if a rapid improvement is made in appearance. An economic rebound and these changes in appearance will work together to improve the quality of marginal uses now on the street. The target for street reconstruction is three years from now, in the early part of 1973. To match that effort, work on remodeling of buildings and replacement of signs must start now.





PRESENT CONDITIONS ON PARTS OF MARKET STREET.



Development of Sign Controls

Special sign controls for Market Street have been suggested for many years, but until the present plans for rebuilding of the street area there was no organizing force, no impetus. Recent developments in other parts of the city have shown that private judgements can produce excellent results in signs; where many separate ownerships exist, however, there is a need for public guidance. In November 1968, a report of the Director of Planning to the Board of Supervisors indicated that in the consideration of any further sign regulations for San Francisco, Market Street should have the highest priority.

Last fall the Board of Supervisors asked the Department to give immediate attention to the Market Street signs question, and to propose legislation. The Board imposed a moratorium on the street that prevents the issuance of sign permits, other than for new businesses and changes in names of businesses, for a period of six months until May 10, 1970. Even the permits for new businesses and name changes will be subject to automatic revocation unless they meet the new standards eventually adopted.

Working with a committee of the City Planning Commission, the Department invited the organizations of owners and businessmen in the Market Street area to form an advisory group to participate with the staffs of the Department and the Transit Task Force in drawing up standards. The organizations represented were the Market Street Development Project, Downtown Association, Building Owners and Managers Association, Retail Dry Goods Association, Chamber of Commerce, Central San Francisco Association, National Association of Theatre Owners of Northern California, and San Francisco Planning and Urban Renewal Association.

The advisory group met periodically over 10 weeks as the staff members developed and presented alternatives. Both real examples and typical situations were considered. All possible controls were reviewed; some were set aside or left to the private review process that it was felt should be set up to establish more detailed standards.

The proposals in this report are the recommendations of the Department to the City Planning Commission. They are backed by a high degree of agreement among the advisory group members, although on specific items some members have favored either more or less control. The Department feels that the standards are balanced and appropriate, and that they are addressed to the types of concerns recognized by the Board of Supervisors when it established the Market Street sign moratorium. The sense of urgency implied by the Board's action argues for early adoption of effective sign controls, with the support of owners and businessmen interested in broad scale improvement of Market Street.

The Proposals in General

San Francisco has a city-wide sign ordinance, enacted in 1965, and the proposed standards for Market Street are an amendment to that ordinance in the form of a special sign district. The city-wide ordinance now prohibits rotating signs and strings of banners known as wind signs, sets a quite generous limit of 12 feet for projection of signs over the sidewalk, and in most cases prevents signs from extending above the roof line. Special limitations on billboards and on size of signs exist next to parks and in the Civic Center area. In addition, the Embarcadero Center and Yerba Buena Center Redevelopment Projects set special sign controls within their jurisdiction. Taken together, all these standards afford little present protection for Market Street.

Other cities of the United States tend to be very restrictive in the sign standards for their high-quality commercial areas. They may allow identification only of the name and purpose of a business, keep signs within 20 feet or so above street level, allow little or no projection, restrict illumination, and limit the size and number of signs for each establishment.

The standards proposed for Market Street are not that restrictive. They must take into account some of the established patterns of identification and the broad range of activities and types of buildings along the two miles of street that are involved. The objective is to have the standards as few and as simple as possible, with concentration upon the most vital items from a public standpoint, recognizing that the key standards must be retroactive to get results. By themselves, these standards will not guarantee signs of high quality; few ordinances can do that. There must be reliance on private effort to go further.

As many as five separate districts were considered for the various portions of the street, but it was concluded that a single, uniform district should be proposed. Although differences in predominant function suggested that the sign standards might vary along the street, the types of standards developed did not lend themselves to this approach and it was felt that a single district would be more equitable and far easier to understand and administer. In actual development, the functional portions of the street, such as office, retail and entertainment, are still expected to differ in their character of development.

A map at the end of this report shows the extent of the special sign district. It includes all of Market Street from The Embarcadero to the Central Skyway overpass, Powell Mall in the first block north of Market (which is included in the bond issue reconstruction), and Hallidie Plaza next to Powell Mall. The district runs for a depth of 100 feet, in order to provide a narrow buffer on intersecting streets.

The major thrusts of the standards for this district, described on the following pages, are to relate signs and building projections to development of the public street areas, especially the rows of trees, to emphasize the new pedestrian orientation of signs, to relate signs better to the scale and design of buildings, and to improve the level of sign quality.



PRESENT CONDITIONS

THE SAME AREA WITH REMODELING



Specific Standards

The standards described here are set out in an ordinance to amend the sign provisions of the City Planning Code (zoning ordinance), and copies of that ordinance are available at the Department's offices. Notices are being sent to owners of record within the proposed district and within 300 feet outside it, informing them of a hearing by the City Planning Commission on these proposals January 29, 1970. The recommendations of the Commission will then be sent to the Board of Supervisors for further hearing and legislative action.

General advertising signs

Signs for off-site advertising of products and services -- known as general advertising signs -- would be prohibited throughout the district. Most of the 65 such signs now along the street are billboards, and these are a serious problem for street appearance. In fact, the quick erection of three new billboards when Fifth and Seventh Streets were cut through north of Market was the spark that touched off present efforts for sign control.

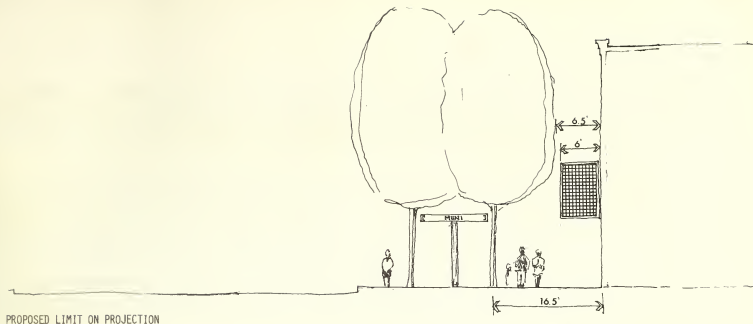
In addition to the area of the district itself, it is proposed that general advertising not be allowed for a further distance of 200 feet outside the district, if the face of the sign would be visible from within the district. Billboards are designed to be read at a distance of several hundred feet. Although only a few now exist just outside the proposed district, it is apparent that removal of those within the district and the continued opening up of new plazas and walkways would result in the placement of a new generation of billboards just beyond the 100-foot depth of the district if this further control were not imposed. Prohibition of billboards for a total depth of 300 feet from Market Street, as proposed, would extend the protection up to one block north of Market and one-half block on the south.

This limitation on general advertising would specifically not apply to advertising on authorized structures in the sidewalk area, such as kiosks. These structures are included in the design for street reconstruction, and they are proposed to be used as a new medium for advertising. Other advertising space is expected to be available in the transit stations, and space on surface transit vehicles will continue to be used. The limitation also does not apply to portions of business signs, up to 25 square feet and one-third the area of the sign, that are devoted to advertising commodities sold on the premises by brand name or symbol. In addition, displays inside show windows are not affected.

Projection over sidewalks

Aside from general advertising, projection over sidewalks is the most important aspect for control. Under the proposals, both signs and other projecting features such as marquees and awnings would be subject to a uniform limit throughout the district of six feet beyond the property line.

The six-foot limitation is established in large part by the physical fact that double rows of trees, where they occur, will provide only a six and one-half foot clearance for signs when the trees are grown to their full spread of ten feet.



PROPOSED LIMIT ON PROJECTION



SIGNS AND AWNINGS MEETING THE PROJECTION LIMIT

Furthermore, observation of existing signs on the street indicates that projections of more than six feet result in confusion and conflicts among signs and an overwhelming effect in relation to stores and sidewalk areas. Modules of four, five and six feet have been used in design of the street furnishings.

With avoidance of conflict with street trees the starting point for a projection limit, it was concluded that six feet should be the standard for the entire street, rather than allowing more projection in areas with single rows of trees and perhaps no projection in selected areas. All owners are given equal treatment by the six-foot standard, which is generous compared with limits in many other sign ordinances. If further restriction is desired in certain areas, it can be imposed by private agreement. The projection limit applies, it should be noted, for a distance of 100 feet along side streets leading off Market, as do the other standards listed here.

The projection limit will cause little change in the design of awnings, which are now limited to a seven-foot projection by the Building Code. Canopies, with posts placed directly on the sidewalk, will not be permitted at all. Marquees, which in the past have been allowed to extend all the way to the curb, must be re-oriented to keep within the six-foot limit; even theatre marquees can be designed with high visibility under this limitation.

As a second type of projection limitation, each establishment would be limited to one projecting sign for each street frontage it occupies, in addition to any signs integrated in the design of marquees and awnings.

Height above the street

Control of sign height is important to maintain scale and some degree of organization in the area occupied by signs, to relate signs to the activities at ground level that they identify, and to suit sign placement to each building and its architectural features.

Minimum heights above the sidewalk -- ten feet for signs and marquees and seven feet for awnings -- are already set by the Building Code and would not be changed by these proposals.

Maximum heights would be subject to three rules, as follows:

1. Projecting signs with vertical lettering would be limited to a height of 60 feet above the street, except that a greater height would be permitted, up to a maximum of 100 feet, provided the top of the sign remained 20 feet below the roof line. A sign 60 feet or less in height could go up to the roof line but not above it. Most existing vertical signs conform to these height limits, although some of them exceed the six-foot limit for projection.

2. All other signs would be confined, generally, to the ground floor and mezzanine levels of the building, keeping them close to the activities they identify and avoiding partial obscuring of windows on upper stories. Any identification for upper floor establishments would be required to be at ground level entrances rather than on the upper windows. If there were no windows above

the ground and mezzanine levels, signs would be allowed up to the first story having windows, with a maximum height of 60 feet. Signs on blank side building walls would, therefore, also be limited to a maximum height of 60 feet.

3. Where a series of shops occupy spaces along the frontage of a single building, a third standard would require that the top and bottom edges of flat signs for these shops be kept uniform, avoiding the ragged appearance that results from indiscriminate placement of the separate signs. Where signs already existed with differing heights, it would be necessary for the building owner to establish a uniform rule to be adhered to by future signs.

Because one main purpose of these last two height standards is to coordinate signs with the architectural features of buildings, a certain leeway would be given by the ordinance, allowing the Zoning Administrator to permit alternative placement in cases in which arches, entrances and other features prevent strict adherence to the standards just described. As a further flexibility, these standards would not apply to special lighting effects and temporary holiday displays.

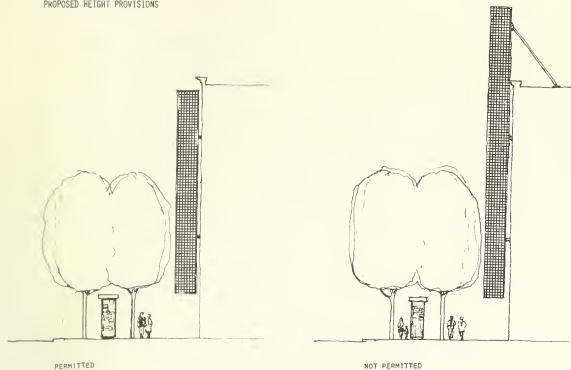
Other requirements

Under the proposals there would be three other requirements, as follows:

1. Temporary signs. Signs of temporary materials such as paper would not be allowed, unless these signs were placed in a frame or on a structure specifically designed for this purpose. Signs fastened to the inside or outside of windows would be included in this prohibition, but window displays behind the glass would not be affected. Holiday decorations are also exempted. Under this requirement, such items as menus, advertisements for special sales and posters showing motion picture attractions would be allowed if they were placed in a frame.

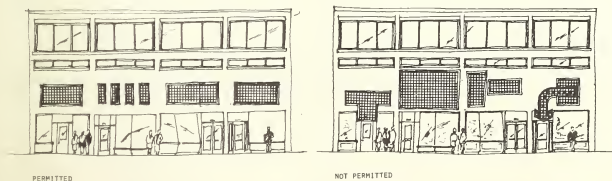
2. Public areas. No sign or other feature would be allowed to rest on a street, alley or public plaza, or in a transit station, without approval of the appropriate public authorities. This restates existing law, if only for emphasis. Publicly-designed kiosks, display cases, transit advertising panels and other such structures would, of course, be permitted by the ordinance in these areas.

3. Maintenance. Signs for active establishments would be required to be maintained in their appearance, or else removed or obscured. When a store became vacant, signs pertaining to the former establishment would have to be removed or obscured within 60 days. These maintenance requirements underscore the importance of observing good standards in the appearance of existing signs as well as new ones.



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Amortization Provisions

Sign ordinances, and especially the one proposed here, cannot be really effective unless a specific time period is given for compliance with the most important standards. Without such compliance, improvement in appearance of the street would be drawn out over a long period; establishments putting up new conforming signs would have them lost in the clutter of the old. In the case of Market Street, paving of sidewalks and placement of trees cannot begin until the area is cleared of sidewalk encroachments and excessive projections. An amortization period is established only for the aspects listed below. As to those aspects, the objective is removal or alteration of nonconforming signs and installation of new signs by the early part of 1973.

1. General advertising. Billboards within the district would be required to be removed within three years after the effective date of the ordinance. Although new billboards would not be allowed for an additional 200 feet outside the district, the removal requirement would apply only to the district itself. The three-year period is reasonable and is supported by court decisions in California. No compensation to the billboard companies is provided for, and with an adequate amortization period none need be offered.

2. Projection. Because signs, marquees and other features projecting over the right-of-way occupy public property and have been put up under revocable permits, no period of amortization is legally needed for their removal. However, in order to give time for remodeling plans to be developed and new signs to be constructed, it is proposed that a period of two years be allowed for compliance with the six-foot projection limit. It is absolutely necessary that excessive projections be removed by that time so that work can proceed in the sidewalk areas.

A certain leeway is given in this removal provision. The Zoning Administrator is empowered to allow signs and other features projecting as much as eight feet to remain, if he determines (1) that the sign or feature is of high quality, in scale with its surroundings, not detrimental to other properties, and not so located that it will conflict with trees or other features in the street area, and (2) that unusual circumstances apply concerning the nature of the sign or feature or concerning the building that would make adherence to the six-foot limitation impractical without offsetting public advantages. No other exceptions would be authorized.

Preliminary surveys show a total of 334 projecting signs, marquees, awnings and canopies along Market Street. Of these, 185 project more than six feet and come within the removal requirement. Of the 185, approximately 68 project no more than eight feet, making them possibly eligible for retention. The removal requirement does not apply to streets leading off Market, except for both sides of Powell and any other frontages within the district that face Market at an angle of less than 90 degrees.

3. Other.

a. Temporary signs. These would be given one year for removal or for alteration to comply with the ordinance. Signs taken down during that period could not, of course, be replaced.

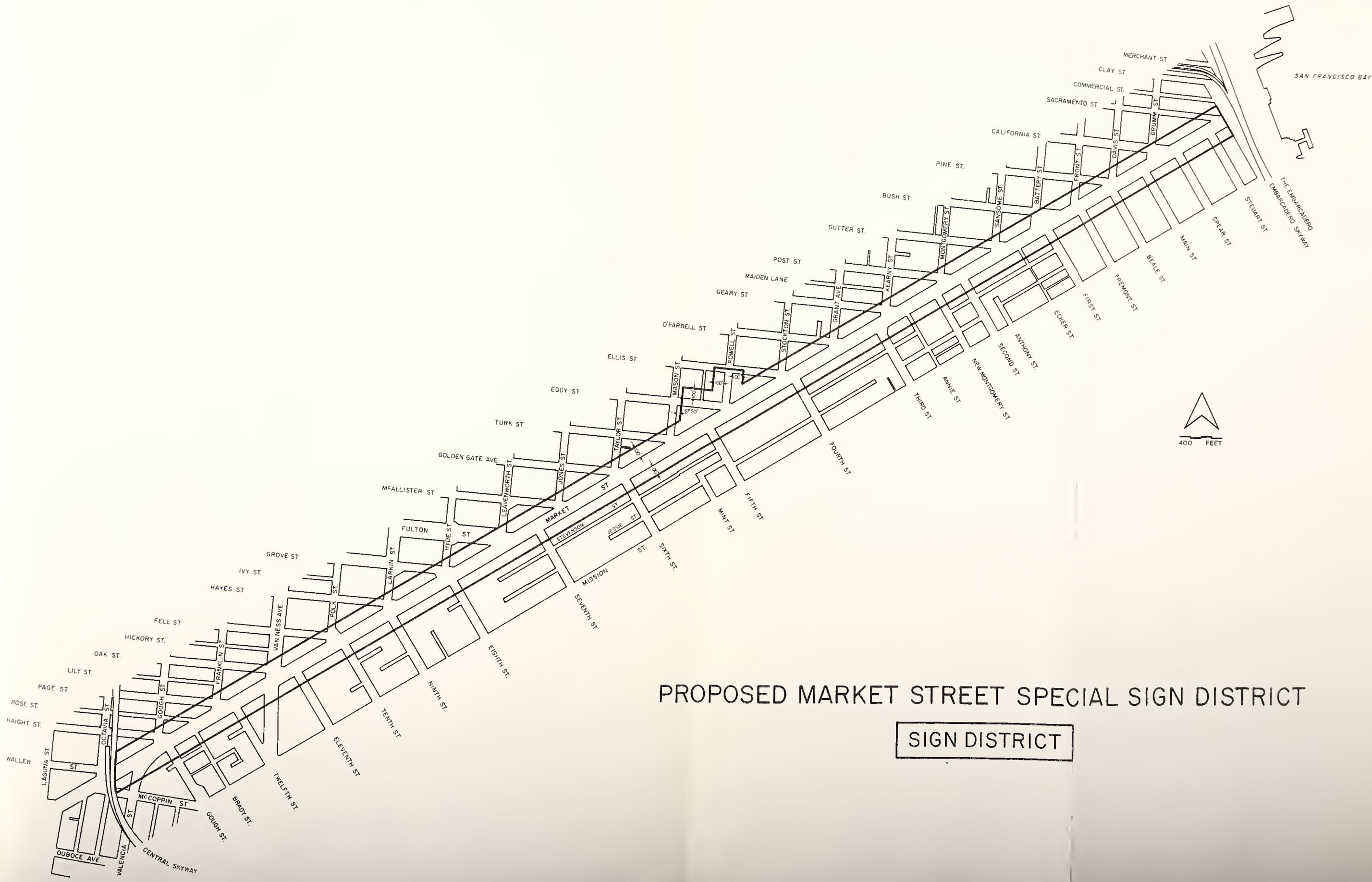
b. Public areas. One year would also be given for removal of structures resting in street areas. This would apply principally to the canopies now on the street.

c. Moving parts. New revolving signs have not been permitted in the city for more than four years, but existing movement has been allowed to continue. A three-year period would be given for revolving signs to be stopped on Market Street.

Private Efforts

The proposed ordinance does not include a mechanism for individual design review of proposed signs. Any sign meeting the standards in the ordinance would be approved by the public authorities. Nevertheless, the ordinance states that the standards it establishes are deemed to be minimum requirements, and that they are not intended to preclude greater refinement by individuals and organizations that choose to apply more restrictive requirements or additional criteria.

The ordinance establishes a general frame of reference and the backup of public regulation, and requires removal of signs in some instances. Private efforts should carry on from there. Individual owners have already applied criteria of materials, color, graphics and general design quality in remodeling of their buildings. Organizations of owners for all or parts of the street should expand these criteria and provide means for relating the signs and remodeling efforts of adjacent buildings. Professional advice in architecture and graphics will be essential in these private efforts toward coordination. Adoption of the ordinance proposed in this report is, however, the first and most essential step for improvement of signs on Market Street.



PROPOSED MARKET STREET SPECIAL SIGN DISTRICT

SIGN DISTRICT



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R. Spencer Steele, Assistant Director - Implementation
(Zoning Administrator)
Robert W. Passmore, Assistant Zoning Administrator
Lynn E. Pio, Administrative Secretary

This report was written by Peter S. Svirsky.
The sketches are by James F. White.
The map was prepared under the direction of Frank Hendricks.

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

DEPARTMENT OF CHEMISTRY

PHYSICAL CHEMISTRY

LECTURE NOTES

BY

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JOHN D. COLEMAN

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